Building an Effective Slideshow

After reading about many of the elements that are *not* helpful in a PowerPoint slideshow—namely words as evidence, bullet points, and decorative (but ultimately useless) clipart—you may be wondering what *is* left to put in your slides. The answer goes something like this: whatever visuals your audience needs to see in order to understand or to be persuaded by your message. While that response may seem vague, what follows will be much more specific in regards to the types of slides and images you can use to build a better slideshow.

This article will cover both the types of slides you should include to keep the slideshow (and overall presentation) organized, as well as rules for each visual-evidence type that adhere to the broad guidelines you read about in the previous article. While you should definitely read this article over in its entirety, it is set up mainly in bullet points (which, again, are okay to use in documents, but not in slideshows) so that you can refer back to the information easily when you are creating a PowerPoint slideshow. The guidelines here are not suggestions; they are requirements. Be sure that you are following all of the rules for each type of slide and each type of visual evidence appropriately. Doing so will ensure that your slides are useful for your audience and simple for them to digest quickly.

Helping the Audience Follow Along: Building an Effective Slideshow Structure

You've already read about the importance of telegraphing your presentation's structure to your audience. You preview your points, transition clearly into each one, summarize frequently, and review the content at the end to ensure that your audience can follow your line of logic or story from beginning to end. In shorter presentations, like the Introductory Presentation you just did, this is relatively simple through words alone. In longer, more complicated presentations, any extra organizational cues you can give your audience is helpful to their ability to understand your points and the relationships between them. Your visual aids offer an excellent opportunity to provide those extra organizational cues to your listeners.

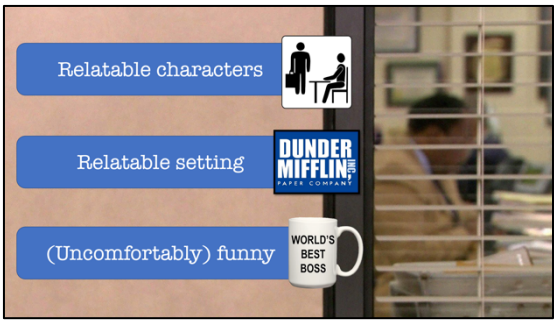
To do that, your slideshow should follow a structure, much like your presentation content. To stay organized, your PowerPoint should include five different slide types: a title slide, a preview slide, transition slides, evidence slides, and a review slide. Each are explained in more detail below:

Title Slide

- This is the first slide of your slideshow.
- It should include a title for the presentation, your name(s), and an image relevant to your presentation that will draw in the audience. It can also include other relevant information, like the date, the organization for which you work, etc.
- In a professional presentation, this slide would be on the screen as your audience files into the room and gets settled. The slide's job is to pique their interest in what is to come.

Preview Slide

- This slide accompanies your spoken preview. It should list out the main points you will cover in the presentation, just as your verbal preview does.
- Your preview slide may use short phrases, but they should still have visual appeal.
- The parts of the preview should be animated, so that each picture/text box pair appear one at a time as you list it aloud.

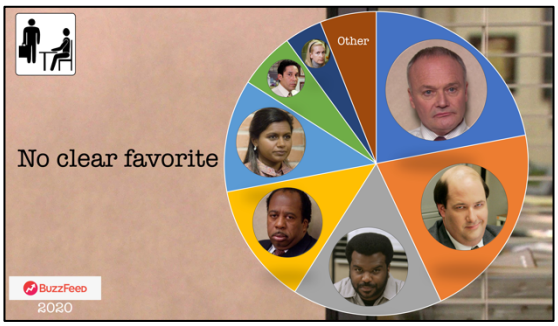


Transition Slides

- These slides should accompany your verbal transitions within the presentation. There should be a transition slide before each main point as you verbally transition into it.
- The transition slides should be similar in style to the preview slide so it's clear what their purpose is.
- The transition slides' only job is to transition; they should not double as photographic evidence or present any new information.

Evidence Slides

- These are the slides where your visual evidence (in the form of pictures, graphs, diagrams, and videos) appears.
- All visual aids on these slides should follow the rules discussed later in this article.
- Visuals should only appear on evidence slides when they either (1) aid in the audience's comprehension and/or memory or (2) aid in persuasion.
- There is no minimum or maximum number of evidence slides. Use however many you need.



Review Slide

- The review slide accompanies your verbal review, where you relist the main points you covered in your presentation.
- It should be the same style as the preview slide, so it's clear to the audience you are summarizing what was covered.
- It should be animated, so that each point stands out when you mention it. You can choose to make each point reappear one at a time, like the preview slide, or you can choose an "Emphasis" animation, which will let each point momentarily stand out as you list it.
- This is the last slide of your slideshow. No references list, "Thank you" slide, "Questions?" slide, or other unnecessary slides should appear at the end.

The full slideshow structure for a basic three-point presentation should look like this:

1. Title slide
2. Preview slide
3. Transition slide into Main Point #1
4. Evidence slide(s) for Main Point #1
5. Transition slide into Main Point #2
6. Evidence slide(s) for Main Point #2
7. Transition slide into Main Point #3
8. Evidence slide(s) for Main Point #3
9. Review slide

Choosing the Right Image: Types of Visual Evidence

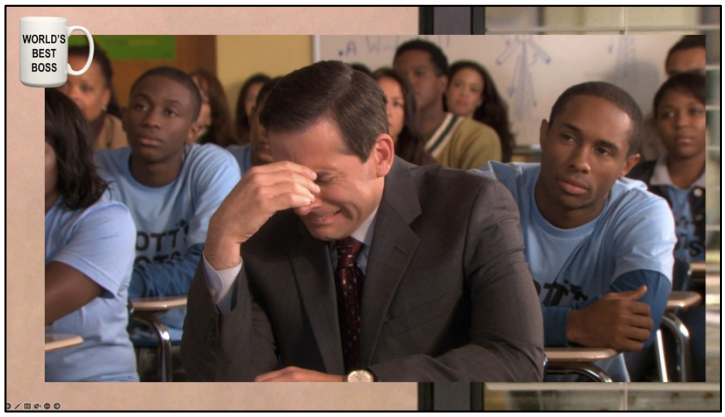
In the slideshow structure mentioned above, the title, preview, transition, and review slides all serve an organizational purpose; in other words, they exist to help the audience follow along with the overall argument the presentation is making. The evidence slides, however, are where the real crux of the message happens. These slides are where your visual evidence should appear. As a reminder, you should *not* use text as your evidence. Explanations should be said aloud by you, not written on your slides, and any images shown should either aid the audience's understanding of what you are saying or help persuade the audience to your intent.

There are four types of visual aids that you can use on your evidence slides in a PowerPoint presentation: pictures, graphs, diagrams, and videos. Each is broken down below:

Pictures

When to Use: To show visual proof, to demonstrate a concept that can be plainly seen in photographic form, or to provide persuasive or emotional support for your message.

The Rules for Pictures:



- You must discuss each image directly for it to follow the usefulness rules; otherwise, it is just fluff and it should be left out.
- Pictures should be photographs unless cartoons are the only options (i.e., when discussing cartoons themselves). No random clipart allowed.
- Pictures must be clear and have a high resolution. If they look fuzzy on your computer screen, they will look even worse when projected.
- There should only be one picture per slide, unless the pictures are animated to appear one at a time as you discuss each one.
- Pictures should not be too gruesome or shocking, or the audience will look away.
- Ensure that images haven't been digitally altered before you present them as fact.
- Cite sources of original photography or artistic renderings.

Graphs/Charts
When to Use: To clarify or illustrate numerical data.

The Rules for Graphs/Charts:

- Make them as simple as possible (eliminate unnecessary numbers, lines, bars, pie pieces, etc.).
- Remove legends and keys; put category labels directly on pie pieces, bars, or lines.
- Use distinct colors (not all shades of one color) that are logical for the data.
- Avoid excessive 3-D; 2-D images are easier for the audience to digest quickly.
- Graph titles should say the main finding of the chart/graph, not just the topic.

Diagrams/Illustrations
When to Use: To help the audience visualize process, parts of a whole, and relative locations; to substitute for real pictures when those real photos would be impossible, too complicated, or too upsetting to show. Drawings of what could easily be shown in a photograph (like a sketch of a real person that mimics a photo) does not qualify as a proper illustration, since it doesn't add anything more than a regular picture would.

The Rules for Diagrams/Illustrations:

- Must be easy for the audience to understand.
- Only highlight parts relevant to your message (edit premade diagrams yourself to follow this rule). Remove labels, or only have labels appear as you discuss each part.
- Use pointing or other means of highlighting to help control the audience's focus.
- Cite original sources for diagrams and illustrations that are not your own.

Videos
When to Use: To show movement, action, processes, or other phenomena that cannot adequately be shown through still images or be explained aloud by you.

The Rules for Videos:

- Only use when necessary; don't use videos to explain or demonstrate something you can explain or show to the audience yourself.
- Keep videos with audio tracks short.
- Must be high quality with enough contrast that the audience can clearly see what is happening.
- Videos should be saved and uploaded directly into the PowerPoint (preferred) or embedded into the slide. Do not simply put a link to the video in the middle of the slide.
- Videos should be introduced aloud before they are shown to the audience. Tell the audience why they are watching the video and to what they should pay the most attention.
- Original sources for videos you did not make should be cited (either aloud or on the slide) if the source is not mentioned in the video.

A common question that students often ask is what they should put on a slide if they don't have a useful visual to support the verbal point they are making. The answer is simple: if no visual evidence is needed to support your verbal point, don't include any visual evidence. You could include a blank, black slide (white slides can be blinding, whereas black slides just look like the projector is off) so that the audience can turn its focus away from the screen and onto you (or in PowerPoint, you could just hit the 'B' button on your keyboard for the same effect). Alternatively, you could choose to leave the PowerPoint on that main point's transition slide and just physically move your body away from the screen to indicate that you are discussing something not on it.

A Note on Animations and Transitions
Animations are the movements (entrance, emphasis, or exit) of specific elements on a single slide; *transitions* (which are different from *transition slides*) in PowerPoint are the means of moving from one slide to another. Animations should be used on the preview and review slide, as well as on any other multi-part evidence slide to make elements appear or be emphasized as they are discussed aloud. Animations should be simple (no twirling, flipping, spinning, or anything else too crazy or nausea-inducing), and they should be quick (otherwise, you will be left with an awkward silence while you wait for the animation to finish).

Adding transitional movements between slides is not required, but if you do choose to use transitions within PowerPoint, use simple ones like Wipe, Fade, or Morph. Please also be consistent: use one style of transition for the entire presentation (don't mix and match).

Animations and transitions can be fun to play with, especially for PowerPoint newbies, but that doesn't mean that they all belong in your slideshow. A key rule to keep in mind is this: don't let your PowerPoint movements be more exciting than you. Visual aids are there to supplement your speaking with a visual channel, not to provide razzle dazzle for the audience. Keep the focus on you and what you are saying; let your visual aids *aid* the message, not take it over.

AIM to Find the Right Visuals

Remember to follow the steps of AIMC. As you choose the visuals you want to use in your presentation (the C for channel), keep in mind that each visual you choose should appeal to your audience (A), help you meet the ultimate intent (I) of your presentation, and support the verbal message (M) you are delivering. Moreover, remember that visuals are for the audience, not for you, and that they should only be shown if they aid in the audience's comprehension and/or memory, or if they will help to persuade the audience to your intent. If a visual does not meet those criteria, choose a new one or choose to show nothing. Build the slideshow around your message; don't build your message around your slides.